

WHY IS SOCIETY BLIND TO BAD WOMEN AND UNFIT MOTHERS?



The Harpy's Child: Characteristics of Narcissistic Mothers – ParrishMiller.com

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or you are not crazy it's your asshole mother.

Before taking blame be sure you are not surrounded by assholes. Sigmund Freud.
From the essay, The Harpy's child.

The original author of this essay is unknown. I republished it many years ago in the hopes it would be of help to people.

"It's about secret things. The Destructive Narcissistic Parent creates a child that only exists to be an extension of her self. It's about body language. It's about disapproving glances. It's about vocal tone. It's very intimate. And it's very powerful. It's part of who the child is."

1. *Everything she does is deniable.* There is always a facile excuse or an explanation. Cruelties are couched in loving terms. Aggressive and hostile acts are paraded as thoughtfulness. Selfish manipulations are presented as gifts. Criticism and slander is slyly disguised as concern. She only wants what is best for you. She only wants to help you.

She rarely says right out that she thinks you're inadequate. Instead, any time that you tell her you've done something good, she counters with something your sibling did that was better or she simply ignores you or she hears you out without saying anything, then in a short time does something cruel to you so you understand not to get above yourself. She will carefully separate cause (your joy in your accomplishment) from effect (refusing to let you borrow the car to go to the awards ceremony) by enough time that someone who didn't live through her abuse would never believe the connection.

Many of her put-downs are simply by comparison. She'll talk about how wonderful someone else is or what a wonderful job they did on something you've also done or how highly she thinks of them. The contrast is left up to you. She has let you know that you're no good without saying a word. She'll spoil your pleasure in something by simply congratulating you for it in an angry, envious voice that conveys how unhappy she is, again, completely deniable. It is impossible to confront someone over their tone of voice, their demeanor or the way they look at you, but once your narcissistic mother has you trained, she can promise terrible punishment without a word. As a result, you're always afraid, always in the wrong, and can never exactly put your finger on why.

Because her abusiveness is part of a lifelong campaign of control and because she is careful to rationalize her abuse, it is extremely difficult to explain to other people what is so bad about her. She's also careful about when and how she engages in her abuses. She's very secretive, a characteristic of almost all abusers ("Don't wash our dirty laundry in public!") and will punish you for telling anyone else what she's done. The times and locations of her worst abuses are carefully chosen so that no one who might intervene will hear or see her bad behavior, and she will seem like a completely different person in public. She'll slam you to other people, but will always embed her devaluing nuggets of snide gossip in protestations of concern, love and understanding ("I feel so sorry for poor Cynthia. She always seems to have such a hard time, but I just don't know what I can do for her!") As a consequence the children of narcissists universally report that no one believes them ("I have to tell you that she always talks about YOU in the most caring way!). Unfortunately therapists, given the deniable actions

of the narcissist and eager to defend a fellow parent, will often jump to the narcissist's defense as well, reinforcing your sense of isolation and helplessness ("I'm sure she didn't mean it like that!")

2. *She violates your boundaries.* You feel like an extension of her. Your property is given away without your consent, sometimes in front of you. Your food is eaten off your plate or given to others off your plate. Your property may be repossessed and no reason given other than that it was never yours. Your time is committed without consulting you, and opinions purported to be yours are expressed for you. (She LOVES going to the fair! He would never want anything like that. She wouldn't like kumquats.) You are discussed in your presence as though you are not there. She keeps tabs on your bodily functions and humiliates you by divulging the information she gleans, especially when it can be used to demonstrate her devotion and highlight her martyrdom to your needs ("Mike had that problem with frequent urination too, only his was much worse. I was so worried about him!") You have never known what it is like to have privacy in the bathroom or in your bedroom, and she goes through your things regularly. She asks nosy questions, snoops into your email/letters/diary/conversations. She will want to dig into your feelings, particularly painful ones and is always looking for negative information on you which can be used against you. She does things against your expressed wishes frequently. All of this is done without seeming embarrassment or thought.

Any attempt at autonomy on your part is strongly resisted. Normal rites of passage (learning to shave, wearing makeup, dating) are grudgingly allowed only if you insist, and you're punished for your insistence ("Since you're old enough to date, I think you're old enough to pay for your own clothes!") If you demand age-appropriate clothing, grooming, control over your own life, or rights, you are difficult and she ridicules your "independence."

3. *She favoritizes.* Narcissistic mothers commonly choose one (sometimes more) child to be the golden child and one (sometimes more) to be the scapegoat. The narcissist identifies with the golden child and provides privileges to him or her as long as the golden child does just as she wants. The golden child has to be cared for assiduously by everyone in the family. The scapegoat has no needs and instead gets to do the caring. The golden child can do nothing wrong. The scapegoat is always at fault. This creates divisions between the children, one of whom has a large investment in the mother being wise and wonderful, and the other(s) who hate her. That division will be fostered by the narcissist with lies and with blatantly unfair and favoritizing behavior. The golden child will defend the mother and indirectly perpetuate the abuse by finding reasons to blame the scapegoat for the mother's actions. The golden child may also directly take on the narcissistic mother's tasks by physically abusing the scapegoat so the narcissistic mother doesn't have to do that herself.

4. *She undermines.* Your accomplishments are acknowledged only to the extent that she can take credit for them. Any success or accomplishment for which she cannot take credit is ignored or diminished. Any time you are to be center stage and there is no opportunity for her to be the center of attention, she will try to prevent the occasion altogether, or she doesn't come, or she leaves early, or she acts like it's no big deal, or she steals the spotlight or she slips in little wounding comments about how much better someone else did or how what you did wasn't as much as you could have done or as you think it is. She undermines you by picking fights with you or being especially unpleasant just before you have to make a major effort. She acts put out if she has to do anything to support your opportunities or will outright refuse to do even small things in support of you. She will be nasty to you about things that are

peripherally connected with your successes so that you find your joy in what you've done is tarnished, without her ever saying anything directly about it. No matter what your success, she has to take you down a peg about it.

5. *She demeans, criticizes and denigrates.* She lets you know in all sorts of little ways that she thinks less of you than she does of your siblings or of other people in general. If you complain about mistreatment by someone else, she will take that person's side even if she doesn't know them at all. She doesn't care about those people or the justice of your complaints. She just wants to let you know that you're never right.

She will deliver generalized barbs that are almost impossible to rebut (always in a loving, caring tone): "You were always difficult" "You can be very difficult to love" "You never seemed to be able to finish anything" "You were very hard to live with" "You're always causing trouble" "No one could put up with the things you do." She will deliver slams in a sidelong way – for example she'll complain about how "no one" loves her, does anything for her, or cares about her, or she'll complain that "everyone" is so selfish, when you're the only person in the room. As always, this combines criticism with deniability.

She will slip little comments into conversation that she really enjoyed something she did with someone else – something she did with you too, but didn't like as much. She'll let you know that her relationship with some other person you both know is wonderful in a way your relationship with her isn't – the carefully unspoken message being that you don't matter much to her.

She minimizes, discounts or ignores your opinions and experiences. Your insights are met with condescension, denials and accusations ("I think you read too much!") and she will brush off your information even on subjects on which you are an acknowledged expert. Whatever you say is met with smirks and amused sounding or exaggerated exclamations ("Uh huh!" "You don't say!" "Really!"). She'll then make it clear that she didn't listen to a word you said.

6. *She makes you look crazy.* If you try to confront her about something she's done, she'll tell you that you have "a very vivid imagination" (this is a phrase commonly used by abusers of all sorts to invalidate your experience of their abuse) that you don't know what you're talking about, or that she has no idea what you're talking about. She will claim not to remember even very memorable events, flatly denying they ever happened, nor will she ever acknowledge any possibility that she might have forgotten. This is an extremely aggressive and exceptionally infuriating tactic called "gaslighting," common to abusers of all kinds. Your perceptions of reality are continually undermined so that you end up without any confidence in your intuition, your memory or your powers of reasoning. This makes you a much better victim for the abuser.

Narcissists gaslight routinely. The narcissist will either insinuate or will tell you outright that you're unstable, otherwise you wouldn't believe such ridiculous things or be so uncooperative. You're oversensitive. You're imagining things. You're hysterical. You're completely unreasonable. You're over-reacting, like you always do. She'll talk to you when you've calmed down and aren't so irrational. She may even characterize you as being neurotic or psychotic.

Once she's constructed these fantasies of your emotional pathologies, she'll tell others about them, as always, presenting her smears as expressions of concern and declaring her own helpless victimhood. She didn't do anything. She has no idea why you're so irrationally angry with her. You've hurt her terribly. She thinks you may need psychotherapy. She loves you very much and would do anything to make you happy, but she just doesn't know what to do. You keep pushing her away when all she wants to do is help you.

She has simultaneously absolved herself of any responsibility for your obvious antipathy towards her, implied that it's something fundamentally wrong with you that makes you angry with her, and undermined your credibility with her listeners. She plays the role of the doting mother so perfectly that no one will believe you.

7. *She's envious.* Any time you get something nice she's angry and envious and her envy will be apparent when she admires whatever it is. She'll try to get it from you, spoil it for you, or get the same or better for herself. She's always working on ways to get what other people have. The envy of narcissistic mothers often includes competing sexually with their daughters or daughters-in-law. They'll attempt to forbid their daughters to wear makeup, to groom themselves in an age-appropriate way or to date. They will criticize the appearance of their daughters and daughters-in-law. This envy extends to relationships. Narcissistic mothers infamously attempt to damage their children's marriages and interfere in the upbringing of their grandchildren.

8. *She's a liar in too many ways to count.* Any time she talks about something that has emotional significance for her, it's a fair bet that she's lying. Lying is one way that she creates conflict in the relationships and lives of those around her – she'll lie to them about what other people have said, what they've done, or how they feel. She'll lie about her relationship with them, about your behavior or about your situation in order to inflate herself and to undermine your credibility.

The narcissist is very careful about how she lies. To outsiders she'll lie thoughtfully and deliberately, always in a way that can be covered up if she's confronted with her lie. She spins what you said rather than makes something up wholesale. She puts dishonest interpretations on things you actually did. If she's recently done something particularly egregious she may engage in preventative lying: she lies in advance to discount what you might say before you even say it. Then when you talk about what she did you'll be cut off with "I already know all about it...your mother told me... (self-justifications and lies)." Because she is so careful about her deniability, it may be very hard to catch her in her lies and the more gullible of her friends may never realize how dishonest she is.

To you, she'll lie blatantly. She will claim to be unable to remember bad things she has done, even if she did one of them recently and even if it was something very memorable. Of course, if you try to jog her memory by recounting the circumstances "You have a very vivid imagination" or "That was so long ago. Why do you have to dredge up your old grudges?" Your conversations with her are full of casual brush-offs and diversionary lies and she doesn't respect you enough to bother making it sound good. For example she'll start with a self-serving lie: "If I don't take you as a dependent on my taxes I'll lose three thousand dollars!" You refute her lie with an obvious truth: "No, three thousand dollars is the amount of the dependent exemption. You'll only lose about eight hundred dollars." Her response: "Isn't that what I said?" You are now in a game with only one rule: You can't win.

On the rare occasions she is forced to acknowledge some bad behavior, she will couch the admission deniably. She “guesses” that “maybe” she “might have” done something wrong. The wrongdoing is always heavily spun and trimmed to make it sound better. The words “I guess,” “maybe,” and “might have” are in and of themselves lies because she knows exactly what she did – no guessing, no might haves, no maybes.

9. *She has to be the center of attention all the time.* This need is a defining trait of narcissists and particularly of narcissistic mothers for whom their children exist to be sources of attention and adoration. Narcissistic mothers love to be waited on and often pepper their children with little requests. “While you’re up...” or its equivalent is one of their favorite phrases. You couldn’t just be assigned a chore at the beginning of the week or of the day, instead, you had to do it on demand, preferably at a time that was inconvenient for you, or you had to “help” her do it, fetching and carrying for her while she made up to herself for the menial work she had to do as your mother by glorying in your attentions.

A narcissistic mother may create odd occasions at which she can be the center of attention, such as memorials for someone close to her who died long ago, or major celebrations of small personal milestones. She may love to entertain so she can be the life of her own party. She will try to steal the spotlight or will try to spoil any occasion where someone else is the center of attention, particularly the child she has cast as the scapegoat. She often invites herself along where she isn’t welcome. If she visits you or you visit her, you are required to spend all your time with her. Entertaining herself is unthinkable. She has always pouted, manipulated or raged if you tried to do anything without her, didn’t want to entertain her, refused to wait on her, stymied her plans for a drama or otherwise deprived her of attention.

Older narcissistic mothers often use the natural limitations of aging to manipulate dramas, often by neglecting their health or by doing things they know will make them ill. This gives them the opportunity to cash in on the investment they made when they trained you to wait on them as a child. Then they call you (or better still, get the neighbor or the nursing home administrator to call you) demanding your immediate attendance. You are to rush to her side, pat her hand, weep over her pain and listen sympathetically to her unending complaints about how hard and awful it is. (“Never get old!”) It’s almost never the case that you can actually do anything useful, and the causes of her disability may have been completely avoidable, but you’ve been put in an extremely difficult position. If you don’t provide the audience and attention she’s manipulating to get, you look extremely bad to everyone else and may even have legal culpability. (Narcissistic behaviors commonly accompany Alzheimer’s disease, so this behavior may also occur in perfectly normal mothers as they age.)

10. *She manipulates your emotions in order to feed on your pain.* This exceptionally sick and bizarre behavior is so common among narcissistic mothers that their children often call them “emotional vampires.” Some of this emotional feeding comes in the form of pure sadism. She does and says things just to be wounding or she engages in tormenting teasing or she needles you about things you’re sensitive about, all the while a smile plays over her lips. She may have taken you to scary movies or told you horrifying stories, then mocked you for being a baby when you cried; she will slip a wounding comment into conversation and smile delightedly into your hurt face. You can hear the laughter in her voice as she pressures you or says distressing things to you. Later she’ll gloat over how much she upset you, gaily telling other people that you’re so much fun to tease, and recruiting others to share in her

amusement. . She enjoys her cruelties and makes no effort to disguise that. She wants you to know that your pain entertains her. She may bring up subjects that are painful for you and probe you about them, all the while watching you carefully. This is emotional vampirism in its purest form. She's feeding emotionally off your pain.

A peculiar form of this emotional vampirism combines attention-seeking behavior with a demand that the audience suffer. Since narcissistic mothers often play the martyr this may take the form of wrenching, self-pitying dramas which she carefully produces, and in which she is the star performer. She sobs and wails that no one loves her and everyone is so selfish, and she doesn't want to live, she wants to die! She wants to die! She will not seem to care how much the manipulation of their emotions and the self-pity repels other people. One weird behavior that is very common to narcissists: her dramas may also center around the tragedies of other people, often relating how much she suffered by association and trying to distress her listeners, as she cries over the horrible murder of someone she wouldn't recognize if they had passed her on the street.

11. *She's selfish and willful.* She always makes sure she has the best of everything. She insists on having her own way all the time and she will ruthlessly, manipulatively pursue it, even if what she wants isn't worth all the effort she's putting into it and even if that effort goes far beyond normal behavior. She will make a huge effort to get something you denied her, even if it was entirely your right to do so and even if her demand was selfish and unreasonable. If you tell her she cannot bring her friends to your party she will show up with them anyway, and she will have told them that they were invited so that you either have to give in, or be the bad guy to these poor dupes on your doorstep. If you tell her she can't come over to your house tonight she'll call your spouse and try get him or her to agree that she can, and to not say anything to you about it because it's a "surprise." She has to show you that you can't tell her "no."

One near-universal characteristic of narcissists: because they are so selfish and self-centered, they are very bad gift givers. They'll give you hand-me-downs or market things for themselves as gifts for you ("I thought I'd give you my old bicycle and buy myself a new one!" "I know how much you love Italian food, so I'm going to take you to my favorite restaurant for your birthday!") New gifts are often obviously cheap and are usually things that don't suit you or that you can't use or are a quid pro quo: if you buy her the gift she wants, she will buy you an item of your choice. She'll make it clear that it pains her to give you anything. She may buy you a gift and get the identical item for herself, or take you shopping for a gift and get herself something nice at the same time to make herself feel better.

12. *She's self-absorbed.* Her feelings, needs and wants are very important; yours are insignificant to the point that her least whim takes precedence over your most basic needs. Her problems deserve your immediate and full attention; yours are brushed aside. Her wishes always take precedence; if she does something for you, she reminds you constantly of her munificence in doing so and will often try to extract some sort of payment. She will complain constantly, even though your situation may be much worse than hers. If you point that out, she will effortlessly, thoughtlessly brush it aside as of no importance (It's easy for you... / It's different for you...).

13. *She is insanely defensive and is extremely sensitive to any criticism.* If you criticize her or defy her she will explode with fury, threaten, storm, rage, destroy and may become violent, beating, confining, putting her child outdoors in bad weather or otherwise engaging in classic physical abuse.

14. *She terrorizes.* For all abusers, fear is a powerful means of control of the victim, and your narcissistic mother used it ruthlessly to train you. Narcissists teach you to beware their wrath even when they aren't present. The only alternative is constant placation. If you give her everything she wants all the time, you might be spared. If you don't, the punishments will come. Even adult children of narcissists still feel that carefully inculcated fear. Your narcissistic mother can turn it on with a silence or a look that tells the child in you she's thinking about how she's going to get even.

Not all narcissists abuse physically, but most do, often in subtle, deniable ways. It allows them to vent their rage at your failure to be the solution to their internal havoc and simultaneously to teach you to fear them. You may not have been beaten, but you were almost certainly left to endure physical pain when a normal mother would have made an effort to relieve your misery. This deniable form of battery allows her to store up her rage and dole out the punishment at a later time when she's worked out an airtight rationale for her abuse, so she never risks exposure. You were left hungry because "you eat too much." (Someone asked her if she was pregnant. She isn't). You always went to school with stomach flu because "you don't have a fever. You're just trying to get out of school." (She resents having to take care of you. You have a lot of nerve getting sick and adding to her burdens.) She refuses to look at your bloody heels and instead the shoes that wore those blisters on your heels are put back on your feet and you're sent to the store in them because "You wanted those shoes. Now you can wear them." (You said the ones she wanted to get you were ugly. She liked them because they were just like what she wore 30 years ago). The dentist was told not to give you Novocain when he drilled your tooth because "he has to learn to take better care of his teeth." (She has to pay for a filling and she's furious at having to spend money on you.)

Narcissistic mothers also abuse by loosing others on you or by failing to protect you when a normal mother would have. Sometimes the narcissist's golden child will be encouraged to abuse the scapegoat. Narcissists also abuse by exposing you to violence. If one of your siblings got beaten, she made sure you saw. She effortlessly put the fear of Mom into you, without raising a hand.

15. *She's infantile and petty.* Narcissistic mothers are often simply childish. If you refuse to let her manipulate you into doing something, she will cry that you don't love her because if you loved her you would do as she wanted. If you hurt her feelings she will aggressively whine to you that you'll be sorry when she's dead that you didn't treat her better. These babyish complaints and responses may sound laughable, but the narcissist is dead serious about them. When you were a child, if you ask her to stop some bad behavior, she would justify it by pointing out something that you did that she feels is comparable, as though the childish behavior of a child is justification for the childish behavior of an adult. "Getting even" is a large part of her dealings with you. Anytime you fail to give her the deference, attention or service she feels she deserves, or you thwart her wishes, she has to show you.

16. *She's aggressive and shameless.* She doesn't ask. She demands. She makes outrageous requests and she'll take anything she wants if she thinks she can get away with it. Her demands of her children are

posed in a very aggressive way, as are her criticisms. She won't take no for an answer, pushing and arm-twisting and manipulating to get you to give in.

17. She “parentifies.” She shed her responsibilities to you as soon as she was able, leaving you to take care of yourself as best you could. She denied you medical care, adequate clothing, necessary transportation or basic comforts that she would never have considered giving up for herself. She never gave you a birthday party or let you have sleepovers. Your friends were never welcome in her house. She didn't like to drive you anywhere, so you turned down invitations because you had no way to get there. She wouldn't buy your school pictures even if she could easily have afforded it. You had a niggardly clothing allowance or she bought you the cheapest clothing she could without embarrassing herself. As soon as you got a job, every request for school supplies, clothing or toiletries was met with “Now that you're making money, why don't you pay for that yourself?” You studied up on colleges on your own and choose a cheap one without visiting it. You signed yourself up for the SATs, earned the money to pay for them and talked someone into driving you to the test site. You worked three jobs to pay for that cheap college and when you finally got mononucleosis she chirped at you that she was “so happy you could take care of yourself.”

She also gave you tasks that were rightfully hers and should not have been placed on a child. You may have been a primary caregiver for young siblings or an incapacitated parent. You may have had responsibility for excessive household tasks. Above all, you were always her emotional caregiver which is one reason any defection from that role caused such enormous eruptions of rage. You were never allowed to be needy or have bad feelings or problems. Those experiences were only for her, and you were responsible for making it right for her. From the time you were very young she would randomly lash out at you any time she was stressed or angry with your father or felt that life was unfair to her, because it made her feel better to hurt you. You were often punished out of the blue, for manufactured offenses. As you got older she directly placed responsibility for her welfare and her emotions on you, weeping on your shoulder and unloading on you any time something went awry for her.

18. She's exploitative. She will manipulate to get work, money, or objects she envies out of other people for nothing. This includes her children, of course. If she set up a bank account for you, she was trustee on the account with the right to withdraw money. As you put money into it, she took it out. She may have stolen your identity. She took you as a dependent on her income taxes so you couldn't file independently without exposing her to criminal penalties. If she made an agreement with you, it was violated the minute it no longer served her needs. If you brought it up demanding she adhere to the agreement, she brushed you off and later punished you so you would know not to defy her again.

Sometimes the narcissist will exploit a child to absorb punishment that would have been hers from an abusive partner. The husband comes home in a drunken rage, and the mother immediately complains about the child's bad behavior so the rage is vented on to the child. Sometimes the narcissistic mother simply uses the child to keep a sick marriage intact because the alternative is being divorced or having to go to work. The child is sexually molested but the mother never notices, or worse, calls the child a liar when she tells the mother about the molestation.

19. *She projects.* This sounds a little like psycho-babble, but it is something that narcissists all do. Projection means that she will put her own bad behavior, character and traits on you so she can deny them in herself and punish you. This can be very difficult to see if you have traits that she can project on to. An eating-disordered woman who obsesses over her daughter's weight is projecting. The daughter may not realize it because she has probably internalized an absurdly thin vision of women's weight and so accepts her mother's projection. When the narcissist tells the daughter that she eats too much, needs to exercise more, or has to wear extra-large size clothes, the daughter believes it, even if it isn't true. However, she will sometimes project even though it makes no sense at all. This happens when she feels shamed and needs to put it on her scapegoat child and the projection therefore comes across as being an attack out of the blue. For example: She makes an outrageous request, and you casually refuse to let her have her way. She's enraged by your refusal and snarls at you that you'll talk about it when you've calmed down and are no longer hysterical.

You aren't hysterical at all; she is, but your refusal has made her feel the shame that should have stopped her from making shameless demands in the first place. That's intolerable. She can transfer that shame to you and rationalize away your response: you only refused her because you're so unreasonable. Having done that she can reassert her shamelessness and indulge her childish willfulness by turning an unequivocal refusal into a subject for further discussion. You'll talk about it again "later" – probably when she's worn you down with histrionics, pouting and the silent treatment so you're more inclined to do what she wants.

20. *She is never wrong about anything.* No matter what she's done, she won't ever genuinely apologize for anything. Instead, any time she feels she is being made to apologize she will sulk and pout, issue an insulting apology or negate the apology she has just made with justifications, qualifications or self pity: "I'm sorry you felt that I humiliated you" "I'm sorry if I made you feel bad" "If I did that it was wrong" "I'm sorry, but there's nothing I can do about it" "I'm sorry I made you feel clumsy, stupid and disgusting" "I'm sorry but it was just a joke. You're so over-sensitive" "I'm sorry that my own child feels she has to upset me and make me feel bad." The last insulting apology is also an example of projection.

21. *She seems to have no awareness that other people even have feelings.* She'll occasionally slip and say something jaw-droppingly callous because of this lack of empathy. It isn't that she doesn't care at all about other people's feelings, though she doesn't. It would simply never occur to her to think about their feelings. An absence of empathy is the defining trait of a narcissist and underlies most of the other traits I have described. Unlike psychopaths, narcissists do understand right, wrong, and consequences, so they are not ordinarily criminal. She beat you, but not to the point where you went to the hospital. She left you standing out in the cold until you were miserable, but not until you had hypothermia. She put you in the basement in the dark with no clothes on, but she only left you there for two hours.

22. *She blames.* She'll blame you for everything that isn't right in her life or for what other people do or for whatever has happened. Always, she'll blame you for her abuse. You made her do it. If only you weren't so difficult. You upset her so much that she can't think straight. Things were hard for her and your backtalk pushed her over the brink. This blaming is often so subtle that all you know is that you thought you were wronged and now you feel guilty. Your brother beats you and her response is to bemoan how uncivilized children are. Your boyfriend dumped you, but she can understand – after all,

she herself has seen how difficult you are to love. She'll do something egregiously exploitative to you, and when confronted will screech at you that she can't believe you were so selfish as to upset her over such a trivial thing. She'll also blame you for your reaction to her selfish, cruel and exploitative behavior. She can't believe you are so petty, so small, and so childish as to object to her giving your favorite dress to her friend. She thought you would be happy to let her do something nice for someone else.

Narcissists are masters of multitasking as this example shows. Simultaneously your narcissistic mother is

1. *Lying*. She knows what she did was wrong and she knows your reaction is reasonable.
2. *Manipulating*. She's making you look like the bad guy for objecting to her cruelties.
3. *Being selfish*. She doesn't mind making you feel horrible as long as she gets her own way.
4. *Blaming*. She did something wrong, but it's all your fault.
5. *Projecting*. Her petty, small and childish behavior has become yours.
6. *Putting on a self-pitying drama*. She's a martyr who believed the best of you, and you've let her down.
7. *Parentifying*. You're responsible for her feelings, she has no responsibility for yours.

23. *She destroys your relationships*. Narcissistic mothers are like tornadoes: wherever they touch down families are torn apart and wounds are inflicted. Unless the father has control over the narcissist and holds the family together, adult siblings in families with narcissistic mothers characteristically have painful relationships. Typically all communication between siblings is superficial and driven by duty, or they may never talk to each other at all. In part, these women foster dissension between their children because they enjoy the control it gives them. If those children don't communicate except through the mother, she can decide what everyone hears. Narcissists also love the excitement and drama they create by interfering in their children's lives. Watching people's lives explode is better than soap operas, especially when you don't have any empathy for their misery.

The narcissist nurtures anger, contempt and envy – the most corrosive emotions – to drive her children apart. While her children are still living at home, any child who stands up to the narcissist guarantees punishment for the rest. In her zest for revenge, the narcissist purposefully turns the siblings' anger on the dissenter by including everyone in her retaliation. ("I can see that nobody here loves me! Well I'll just take these Christmas presents back to the store. None of you would want anything I got you anyway!") The other children, long trained by the narcissist to give in, are furious with the troublemaking child, instead of with the narcissist who actually deserves their anger.

The narcissist also uses favoritism and gossip to poison her childrens' relationships. The scapegoat sees the mother as a creature of caprice and cruelty. As is typical of the privileged, the other children don't see her unfairness and they excuse her abuses. Indeed, they are often recruited by the narcissist to adopt her contemptuous and entitled attitude towards the scapegoat and with her tacit or explicit permission, will inflict further abuse. The scapegoat predictably responds with fury and equal contempt. After her children move on with adult lives, the narcissist makes sure to keep each apprised of the doings of the others, passing on the most discreditable and juicy gossip (as always, disguised as "concern") about the other children, again, in a way that engenders contempt rather than compassion.

Having been raised by a narcissist, her children are predisposed to be envious, and she takes full advantage of the opportunity that presents. While she may never praise you to your face, she will likely crow about your victories to the very sibling who is not doing well. She'll tell you about the generosity she displayed towards that child, leaving you wondering why you got left out and irrationally angry at the favored child rather than at the narcissist who told you about it.

The end result is a family in which almost all communication is triangular. The narcissist, the spider in the middle of the family web, sensitively monitors all the children for information she can use to retain her unchallenged control over the family. She then passes that on to the others, creating the resentments that prevent them from communicating directly and freely with each other. The result is that the only communication between the children is through the narcissist, exactly the way she wants it.

24. As a last resort she goes pathetic. When she's confronted with unavoidable consequences for her own bad behavior, including your anger, she will melt into a soggy puddle of weepy helplessness. It's all her fault. She can't do anything right. She feels so bad. What she doesn't do: own the responsibility for her bad conduct and make it right. Instead, as always, it's all about her, and her helpless self-pitying weepiness dumps the responsibility for her consequences AND for her unhappiness about it on you. As so often with narcissists, it is also a manipulative behavior. If you fail to excuse her bad behavior and make her feel better, YOU are the bad person for being cold, heartless and unfeeling when your poor mother feels so awful.